

When my daughter Tracy was six years old, we went Christmas tree shopping with her friend Johnathan in tow. Being city slickers, we went to a lot in the middle of St. Petersburg to discern the very best Christmas tree available. The precocious child explained that she would be making the choice.

After exhaustive and careful deliberation, she settled on the shortest, most ununiformed sad excuse for a Christmas tree on the lot. As I carefully and gently explained the obvious flaws in her choice, how short it was, that one side was devoid of limbs or greenery, and that there were much finer choice for our wonderful home, she burst into tears.

“Dad, this tree is so ugly that if we don’t take it no one else will, and it won’t get to be a Christmas tree,” she explained to me. As you might surmise, we paid for the tree, tied it to the top of our car, and headed home with two cheerful children repeatedly singing Jingle Bells all the whole way home, only interrupted by Tracy declaring that the tree’s name was Garfield, after the cartoon cat. I did notice the similarity. I was never so relieved to get home.

Thankfully, that compassion was retained throughout Tracy’s life, like the time in high school when she learned sign language so she could translate the coach’s instructions for a hearing impaired girl so she could join the basketball team. That compassion helped mold four wonderful children, my grandchildren.

Forty five years later, I still clearly remember Garfield. It was the best Christmas tree we ever had.